

THE MIND'S EYE

A Liberal Arts Journal
Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts



John Dewey's Conception of the Role and Methods of Philosophy

By Richard Markham

Dangerous Beauty: Wives vs. Courtesans, Church vs. State

By Meera Tamaya

St. Cloud, 1926 *By Thomas Weston Fels*

Poetry by: *David Raffeld, Abbot Cutler, Mary Kennan Herbert*

Figures and Movement: Art, Dance, and Liberation Theory in the Late Work of Maurice Prendergast *By Tony Gengarelly*

Memories of the Civil Rights Movement *By Frances Jones-Sneed*

History and Identity—A Creative Union?: Lessons from Israelis and Palestinians *By Sumi Colligan*

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Spring 1999

The Editor's File 4

**John Dewey's Conception of the Role and
Methods of Philosophy 5**

By Richard Markham

***Dangerous Beauty: Wives vs. Courtesans,
Church vs. State* 18**

By Meera Tamaya

Poetry by:

David Raffeld 25

Abbot Cutler 28

Mary Kennan Herbert 30

St. Cloud, 1926 31

By Thomas Weston Fels

Figures and Movement:

**Art, Dance, and Liberation Theory in the
Late Work of Maurice Prendergast 37**

By Tony Gengareilly

Memories of the Civil Rights Movement 54

Review Essay

By Frances Jones-Sneed

**History and Identity—A Creative Union?:
Lessons from Israelis and Palestinians 61**

Book Review

By Sumi Colligan

Contributors 67

The Editor's File

Considering the eclectic nature of this edition's contents, the synchronistic qualities are remarkable. Who would have thought that John Dewey had anything in common with Isadora Duncan? Yet, Dick Markham's perceptive essay on Dewey and Tony Gengarely's account of early modern art and dance present us with two examples of the diverse thinking that surfaced in America during the early twentieth century. Dewey's scientific approach to problem solving and Duncan's call for spiritual liberation were, each in its own way, radical solutions to contemporary social problems. Tom Fels also brings us to the same time frame with his insightful interpretation of one of Atget's renowned Parisian photographs.

With a focus on the personal and immediate, the three review essays present congruence in a slightly different manner. Meera Tamaya explores the modern courtesan celebrity by using a sixteenth-century film character as a point of departure. Sumi Colligan's speculations about an eventual reconciliation of opposites in the Middle East and Frances Jones-Sneed's personal account of the American Civil Rights Movement stretch their sources as well in an attempt to bring a sense of contemporary urgency and possibility to their historically based subjects.

We are pleased, once more, to publish the poetry of Abbot Cutler. The inclusion of additional poems by David Raffeld and Mary Herbert, both guest contributors, continues to extend the range of this journal, which has now completed two full years of publication. In many ways we have reached our goals originally set forth by the MCLA Board of Trustees: first, "to publish the academic and creative endeavors of the MCLA faculty"; second, "to help the college reach out to alumni and the broader community which touches and supports the campus." The submissions deadline for the Fall edition is July 15. We encourage contributions from our colleagues and off-campus readers.

John Dewey's Conception of the Role and Methods of Philosophy

BY RICHARD MARKHAM

John Dewey knew he was living in the midst of economic, scientific, political and religious developments signaling the end of the modern era and the beginning of an age yet to be clearly defined. He devoted a lifetime to exploring the implications and ramifications of these developments, including the need for what he called a reconstruction in philosophy. What should be the role of philosophy in the post-modern age and what methods should philosophers use to make the most fruitful contributions to society? He developed answers to these questions compatible with his evolutionary naturalism, answers which can still speak to us as we confront the challenges of a new century.

Dewey often contrasted his positions with those of traditional philosophy on the one hand and, on the other, with those twentieth century philosophers content to focus on matters of language and logic. Traditionally, most philosophers sought to rise above the conditions and circumstances of their times in search of a system of thought embodying "higher" truths and values. They were persons of vast learning who, in relative seclusion, sought insight into an ultimate reality transcending immediate experience and who, from time to time, shared the fruits of their labors with less ambitious souls. Dewey respected the systematic contributions made by tradi-

tional philosophers within their differing historical contexts and he made frequent references to them in his writings, but he agreed with others that it was time for philosophers, indeed all of us, to give up the search for final answers. Traditional philosophical systems, though admirably systematic, generally were too abstract to have much practical value. "The charge that is brought against the non-empirical method of philosophizing is not that it depends upon theorizing, but that it fails to use refined, secondary products as a path pointing and leading back to something in primary experience." (*Experience and Nature*, 6) Throughout his career, Dewey became increasingly critical of those who continued a "quest for certainty," whether they sought comfort in some set of supernatural beliefs or whether they strove to establish fixed and final natural laws. Either way, from his point of view, the energy expended seeking definition of some ultimate reality could be better spent tackling issues and problems that surround us.

He disagreed just as much with the tendency of many twentieth-century philosophers who, like him, abandoned the quest to find absolute and universal truths but who, in contrast, saw no role for philosophy to play in addressing major social issues. They carved out a radically diminished role for philosophy and pursued goals much more modest than those of traditional philosophers. Many of this new breed tended to disregard the contributions of philosophers in the past, to concentrate instead on language and logic analyses, and to isolate themselves from the issues and events of the century. Late in his life, he expressed his concerns about this trend to the Graduate Department of Philosophy at Columbia University:

The most discouraging thing in philosophy is neo-scholastic formalism which also happened in the Middle Ages. It is form today for its own sake, in so many cases. A form of forms, not forms of subject matter. But the subject matter is so chaotic and confused today in the world that it is difficult to handle. This is how I would explain this retreat from work in the facts of human life into purely formal issues—I hesitate to call them issues because nothing ever issues except more form! (*Miscellaneous Writings* 469)

Dewey affirmed the need for formal analysis in the work of philosophy, but not if was analysis in a vacuum, divorced from the real-life social, political, religious, and ethical issues facing us in this challenging period of human history.

So, for Dewey, instead of searching for ultimate truths on the one hand, or falling victim to the paralysis of analysis on the other, philosophers should acquire the perspectives necessary to discern

underlying cultural movements and dilemmas which escape common notice and which fuel the conflicts and perplexities within various domains of human conduct. He was a new kind of philosopher, one who saw philosophical activity as an integral part and outgrowth of social experience rather than as an abstract endeavor set apart from the major issues of any age. Drawing upon the best of relevant past and present thought, philosophers should employ analytical skills to define problematic situations more completely. Having done so, they should not shrink from offering creative solutions and subjecting their proposals to the critical eye of others. Philosophers should once again engage in the search for wisdom, not the kind of wisdom pursued by traditional philosophies, but the only kind of wisdom capable of producing fruitful results, namely the kind of wisdom that is the product of informed and intelligent inquiry. In *Experience and Nature*, Dewey offered what he called a first-rate test of the value of any philosophy:

Does it end in conclusions which, when they are referred back to ordinary life-experiences, render them more significant, more luminous to us, and make our dealings with them more fruitful? Or does it terminate in rendering the things of ordinary experience more opaque than they were before....Does it yield the enrichment and increase of power of ordinary things which the results of physical science afford when applied in everyday affairs? Or does it become a mystery that these ordinary things should be what they are; and are philosophic concepts left to dwell in separation in some technical realm of their own? It is the fact, I repeat, that so many philosophies terminate in conclusions that make it necessary to disparage and condemn primary experience....which leads cultivated common-sense to look askance at philosophy. (7-8)

What are the kinds of problems and issues Dewey believed most require the attention of philosophers? During his lifetime, Dewey witnessed the shift from an agricultural to an urban way of life, vast improvements in the means of communication and transportation, and the growth of large, complex institutions. The transformations wrought by the industrial and technological revolutions radically altered the way most humans lived their day-to-day lives. At the same time, he was convinced that most people still clung to ideas and beliefs about God, about the nature of reality, about human nature, and about the nature of truth which were the product of pre-scientific belief systems. As Dewey put it, "Habits of thought and desire remain

in substance what they were before the rise of science, while the conditions under which they take effect have been radically altered by science." (*Philosophy and Civilization* 318)

The disjunctions between the old and new were manifest in many ways. In the political realm the weapons of war had become more terrible while nations still clung to nationalistic beliefs and hierarchical structures of authority characteristic of the modern era from 1600-1914. In the domain of religion, science and Biblical research seriously questioned traditional beliefs, yet many still held to literal interpretations of their central texts. In education, factory models predominated even though studies of psychological development supported more fluid organizational arrangements. In ethics, the foundations of traditional moral frameworks were shaken by events in the twentieth century, yet people continued to view ethical standards as absolutes. If Dewey were living today, he would argue rigidly held moral views are too static to cope with the numerous dilemmas resulting from developments in modern genetics.

At a deeper level was the disjunction between traditional dualistic patterns of thought on the one hand and, on the other, scientific discoveries making untenable such dichotomies as mind-body, individual-society, subject-object, experience-nature, spiritual-material. For Dewey, such dualities are the products of outworn assumptions about reality, human nature, and truth, and as long as we hang onto those assumptions we'll be blocked from resolving apparent dichotomies and achieving a coherent, consistent world view compatible with the findings of modern science.

So, philosophers should be concerned with the disjunctions between old and new cultural conditions and with the indefensible continuation of dualistic thinking. Minor adjustments in traditional patterns of thought will not be sufficient. For Dewey, the number of dualities and the magnitude of social problems and conflicts are such as to require nothing less than a wholesale transformation in our basic assumptions about reality, about human nature, and about truth. Only such a large-scale, systematic revision of traditional paradigms will allow fruitful resolutions of major issues and dualities.

Especially to be questioned is the traditional notion that there is an absolute and more perfect reality transcending human experience, that such a reality is accessible to human reason, that knowledge is the product of reasoned efforts to know that ultimate realm, and that our notion of what is true and good at our level of existence should strive to approximate absolute truths and values located in the higher reality. Such traditional notions are part and parcel of a medieval perspective which, in modified form, continued to prevail into the

twentieth century and still echoes today. Our language is shot through and through with references to levels of being, higher and lower truths, superior and inferior forms of life. Many still speak of a heaven above and a fiery hell below. Our institutions largely are hierarchically organized, reflecting age-old patterns of authority.

Dewey believed it absolutely imperative that hierarchical conceptions of reality give way to an evolutionary world view if we are to reduce the discord among people, resolve the dualities in our thinking, and fashion a more aesthetically gratifying existence. Bringing about a transformation will require building upon significant twentieth-century movements in science and philosophy that grew out of developments begun several centuries ago when the Copernican and Newtonian revolutions changed forever the idea that the earth was at the center of a spherical universe. Dewey was fully cognizant that such developments were culminating in a view of reality as an immense and ever-changing cosmos, not a great chain of being.

Instead of a closed universe, science now presents us with one infinite in space and time, having no limits here or there, at this end, so to speak, or at that, and as infinitely complex in internal structure as it is infinite in extent. Hence it is also an open world, an infinitely variegated one, a world which in the old sense can hardly be called a universe at all; so multiplex and far-reaching that it cannot be summed up and grasped in any one formula. (*Reconstruction in Philosophy* 54)

The universe, incredibly vast, virtually limitless in extent, expanding rapidly since the Big Bang some 15 billion years ago, may have no absolute beginning nor any absolute end. It's differentiated in a marvelous variety of ways ranging from the smallest invisible phenomena to distant stars accessible only with the largest and most powerful telescopes. This reality is far more complex, far less certain and secure than the hierarchical levels of reality conceived in the past within which human beings were considered to occupy a special place. But it also is far more mysterious and interesting and far richer in possibilities.

In addition to transforming our thinking about reality, we must alter traditional conceptions of human nature, which, if they go unchallenged, will continue to fuel human conflicts. As long as we continue to believe that each human being is a special creation of God and is endowed with an individual and eternal soul, we'll continue to fight over which God has created some of us more special than others. Darwin's theory of evolution, bolstered by subsequent ad-

vances in genetics, undermines the notion that human beings occupy some special central place in the scheme of things. Humans are but one species among millions and millions of others that have come and gone. We are as much part of the natural world as are other species of plants and animals. Yes, we differ in that our species has evolved a complex and intricate brain structure making it possible to invent and utilize a vast range of symbol systems with which we represent features of immediate experience and endeavor to make sense of the greater reality. But we are not creatures endowed with a soul having supernatural origins. We must come to accept our place within the elaborate and intricate fabric of nature and realize that we need to continue to adapt if we are not to join the millions of other species that have come and gone.

For Dewey, the shift from hierarchical to evolutionary conceptions of reality and human nature also has drastic implications for how we think about the nature of truth. Instead of conceiving Truth to occupy some imaginary higher realm, we must accept that the truths we live by are partial and tentative, subject to change as required to meet the challenges of evolving circumstances. No longer can any individual or culture lay claim to having a privileged and exclusive corner on what is true, right, and good. Each of us has a unique genetic configuration and operates within particular cultural contexts, and our perspectives are thereby limited. No person or culture has a God's eye view of our circumstances.

Does this mean that all truths are of equal value? Not for Dewey. Some truths are more soundly established than others because they are the product of informed and intelligent inquiry. They are not final truths, but they can withstand public scrutiny better than others that are the products of habit, custom, convention, and superficial opinion uncritically examined. Acceptance of our place within a changing cosmos will bring us to acknowledge that all categories of thought arise out of human experience, that knowledge should be used instrumentally, and that warranted judgments about truth and good are the outcome of careful observations and reasoned hypotheses rigorously tested.

The role of philosophy is to elaborate and communicate these new conceptions of reality, human nature, and truth, to show how they resolve troubling dualities, and to explore their implications for how we conduct our affairs in every domain of human life. This is what Dewey sought to do; his numerous articles and books stand as testimony of his commitment to the "reconstruction of philosophy." His works address significant issues in art, religion, politics, logic, ethics, and especially in education. Throughout all of them, he

contrasted his new ways of thinking with patterns of thought we should outgrow, and utilized methods of inquiry compatible with his underlying assumptions about reality, human nature, and truth.

What methods of effective inquiry will make the most fruitful contributions to society? Dewey answered these questions most thoroughly and systematically in books like *How We Think* and *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*. True to his evolutionary convictions, he believed all human inquiries follow a basic pattern operating within all living things, namely that of experiencing needs, exerting efforts to satisfy those needs, and enjoying satisfactory consummations. Because of the human capacity for complex symbol systems, the "needs" we experience are much more complex and varied than those of simpler forms of life, the "efforts" we exert are more elaborate and potent, and the "consummations" we can experience are far richer. This underlying pattern of inquiry is manifest in all human activities, whether in our personal lives, our occupational and professional responsibilities, or our artistic and scientific endeavors.

As models of informed and intelligent inquiry, he referenced the methods so evident in the contributions of science over the past several centuries. Experiencing the desire to probe the secrets of nature, scientists have defined problems clearly, articulated hypotheses, and tested them rigorously in the hopes of achieving satisfactory and defensible results. Throughout, they have drawn upon the accumulated wisdom of the past without becoming its prisoner, gathered and analyzed relevant data without undue prejudice, and creatively proposed solutions without naive expectations of receiving unquestioned agreement from their peers.

All of us benefit from the fruits of scientific inquiry, but untold further values would accrue were we to practice in all realms of human life the reflective modes of thought exemplified by the best of scientific research. In this endeavor, philosophers should take the lead. Departing from their traditional role of using reason and/or faith to access a presumed higher realm of Truth, they must practice informed and intelligent inquiry as the surest means for challenging the hierarchical patterns of thought appropriate for an earlier age and for proposing solutions to fundamental questions and issues.

The reconstruction to be undertaken is not that of applying "intelligence" as something ready made. It is to carry over into any inquiry into human and moral subjects the kind of method (the method of observation, theory as hypothesis, and experimental test) by which understanding of physical nature has been brought to its present pitch. (*Reconstruction in Philosophy*, ix)

Throughout their work, philosophers must perform two functions, one critical or analytic, the other hypothetical or visionary. The critical or analytic function clears the way for the second. Performing the critical function requires that philosophers examine the roots of whatever problem they are addressing. This is not easy because philosophers, themselves, are products of the past and must, if they are to perform a leadership role in helping influence others and the public at large to alter their own "outworn attitudes," work to disentangle themselves from ideas and themes that hinder progress. As Dewey put it:

. . . Philosophy has now to do a hard and, for many of us, a disagreeable job. This is the work of getting rid, by means of thinking as exact and critical as possible, of perpetuations of those outworn attitudes which prevent those engaged in philosophical reflection from seizing the opportunities now open. This is the critical, or, if one please, the negative, aspect of the task to be undertaken in the present state of philosophy. (*Problems of Men* 16)

But it will not be enough for philosophers to perform a critical function within their own domain and within society at large. Being analytical only prepares the ground for creative speculation. Philosophers must not shrink from this challenge. Drawing upon the wisdom of the past and relevant contributions of science, they should engage in formulating imaginative hypotheses for dealing with the problems of men.

Philosophy still has a work to do. . . . It may turn to the projection of large generous hypotheses which, if used as plans of action, will give intelligent direction to men in search for ways to make the world more one of worth and significance, more homelike, in fact. There is no phase of life, educational, economic, political, religious, in which inquiry may not aid in bringing to birth that world which Matthew Arnold rightly said was as yet unborn. Present-day philosophy cannot desire a better work than to engage in the act of midwifery that was assigned to it by Socrates twenty-five hundred years ago. (*Problems of Men* 20)

Lest Dewey be misunderstood, it may be well to reemphasize that he was not advocating that philosophers attempt great syntheses that would solve human problems for all time. The speculations and visions of philosophers are hypothetical, subject to the test of human experience. Dewey was dedicated completely to the notion that our

categories of thought, our "objects of reflection," "secondary objects," "hypotheses," "refined objects," have value only to the extent that they enrich primary experience. This conviction is manifested in his constant emphasis of the importance of a thoroughly empirical technique, one involving the double movement back and forth between theory and practice.

[The primary concern of philosophy] is to clarify, liberate, and extend the goods which inhere in the naturally generated functions of experience. It has no call to create a world of "reality" *de novo* nor to delve into secrets of Being hidden from common-sense and science. It has no stock of information or body of knowledge peculiarly its own. . . . Its business is to accept and to utilize for a purpose the best available knowledge of its own time and place. And this purpose is criticism of beliefs, institutions, customs, policies with respect to their bearing upon good. This does not mean their bearing upon the good, as something itself attained and formulated in philosophy. For as philosophy has no private store of knowledge or of methods for attaining truth, so it has no private access to good. As it accepts knowledge of facts and principles from those competent in inquiry and discovery, so it accepts the goods that are diffused in human experience. It has no Mosaic nor Pauline authority of revelation entrusted to it. But it has the authority of intelligence, of criticism of these common and natural goods. (*Experience and Nature* 407-408)

Application of intelligence, using the inquiry methods proven by science, drawing upon relevant knowledge constructed in various disciplines, gradually constructing trenchant hypotheses, these are among the hallmarks of Dewey's conception of the methods necessary for philosophy to fulfill its new role.

Unsatisfied with abstract recommendations, Dewey filled his writings with examples wherein he practiced what he preached. Take first his way of resolving the seemingly irreconcilable dualities referenced earlier in this paper and lingering on in our century. First, through careful analysis, it was necessary to understand their roots in past cultural conditions. Dualisms such as mind-body have a long history and for centuries were not deemed problematic; they were compatible with hierarchical conceptions of reality, human nature, and truth. As long as minds were considered the instrument for accessing higher levels of reality and truth; as long as bodies were trapped in a lower reality; as long as a spiritual soul was assumed to

have access to God and to have priority over one's material body; as long as the Church was the accepted institution having responsibility for the moral well-being of humanity, and secular institutions were responsible for secular matters, everything fit.

But this integrated system was challenged by the rise of science in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and dualities became problematic. Intellectuals were conflicted between the claims of faith and the claims of science, between the religious and the secular. To avoid cognitive dissonance, the uneasy compromise was to compartmentalize. Separate mind and body. Separate the domains of religion and science, the spiritual and material. Distinguish subjective selves from objective nature. But compartmentalization, albeit a temporary solution, is not intellectually satisfying. Hence, long debates continue today about how mind is related to body, about whether there is a spiritual dimension transcending material existence, about the lines of demarcation between individual and society, about how to distinguish the subjective and the objective.

Dewey believed resolution of problematic dualities will come only when we surrender the hierarchical paradigm supporting them and begin to explore the rich potential of an evolutionary frame of reference. To illustrate further, consider the still often accepted dualism between mind and body. Such a notion has its origins in the class structure of ancient Greece and the Platonic notion that reason should subordinate the senses. The life of the mind was superior to activities of the body. Christianity sharpened the distinction between mind and body by associating the mental with eternal life, with spirituality, and with potential for improvement and associating the body with temporal concerns, with materiality, and with susceptibility to the influence of evil. God gave humans dominion over nature and the free will to choose between the higher life of the soul and the temptations of the body.

Given the scientific discoveries of the past two centuries, such dualistic thinking is no longer defensible. Drawing upon the contributions of modern science, Dewey sees no sharp separation between mind and body, between mental operations and natural processes. The operations we associate with reasoning (the ability to classify phenomena, analyze, explore assumptions, think logically, discern patterns among processes, and other such mental abilities) are operations *within* nature and are analogous with organic activity at lower levels of complexity. "The mind is within the world as a part of the latter's own ongoing process. It is marked off as mind by the fact that wherever it is found, changes take place in a *directed* way, so that a movement in a definite one-way sense—from the doubtful and

confused to the clear, resolved and settled-takes place" (*Quest for Certainty* 291). There is no need to resort to supernatural explanations to account for the operations of intelligence we associate with mind.

This is not the place to go into greater detail concerning Dewey's concept of mind; suffice it to say that his views contrasted radically from older ways of thinking.

The old center was mind knowing by means of an equipment of powers complete within itself, and merely exercised upon an antecedent external material equally complete in itself. The new center is indefinite interactions taking place within a course of nature which is not fixed and complete, but which is capable of direction to new and different results through the mediation of intentional operations. Neither self nor world, neither soul nor nature (in the sense of something isolated and finished in its isolation) is the center, any more than either earth or sun is the absolute center of a single universal and necessary frame of reference. (*Quest for Certainty* 290)

Dewey's methods when addressing dualities were identical to those employed when he wrote about social, political, religious, and educational issues. Define a problem, analyze the roots of conventional alternatives, and propose solutions grounded in his evolutionary naturalism. For example, with respect to education, he recognized that those advocating structure, discipline, and a tight curriculum on the one hand and those supporting looser reins and student choice of curriculum on the other actually were giving expression to different poles of a structure-freedom duality. The advocates of structure believed that established truths were approximations of some higher reality and therefore should drive the curriculum; the supporters of freedom challenged this traditional paradigm but their solutions amounted to rebellion against its grip rather than representing a creative new approach grounded in assumptions compatible with modern science.

Dewey agreed that the traditional structure, curriculum, and methods prevailing in traditional schools needed change, but he was no advocate of free schools where children could study whatever and whenever they wished. Accumulated knowledge from the past is to be valued and transmitted to new generations but not as a load of predigested facts. Instead, teachers should structure their classrooms in a way that builds upon children's curiosity about their natural and social environment, and should then nourish the underlying pattern of inquiry children share with all forms of life by fueling it with

relevant knowledge drawn from a valued past. The aim throughout should be to develop within children the patterns of informed and intelligent thinking so necessary if they are to become creative and productive citizens as adults.

If we were to accept Dewey's conception of the role and methods of philosophy and agree with his conviction that we need a wholesale transformation in our conceptions of reality, human nature, and truth, might there not be a price to pay? If we embrace his views, will it not mean sacrificing the morals and values we've associated with a spiritual realm? If all that we've associated with being distinctively human can be explained as the product of natural processes, what happens to the notion of a soul, to the integrity of the person, to our religious rituals? While not denying that an evolutionary perspective will require giving up some of these notions and practices, Dewey believed that the values we've long revered need not be sacrificed by operating within an evolutionary paradigm. Fear of their loss occurs only if one assumes that the values we hold dear have their ultimate location within a higher spiritual realm and are accessible only through reason or faith.

In fact, all the goods and values ever experienced are the products of human interactions with the rest of a natural world indescribably rich in qualities and potential. Every moment of our lives has a qualitative dimension and the goods we experience are simply those which are drawn from an immense pool of latent others. Over the centuries, we've come to revere some goods more than others, converting them into chosen values. Many of these, such as love, compassion, reverence for life, respect for other persons, are ones we've associated with religion and spirituality. There is no reason why we should not continue to hold these values in high esteem. Indeed, they should operate as "principles" regulating our conduct as we seek to realize the goals and objectives Dewey called ends-in-view. There is no need to imagine values as located in some superior realm, accessible only to a favored few. Indeed, to the extent that we employ the operations of intelligence to achieve desired ends rather than experiencing feelings of guilt because we haven't lived up to some impossible standard, they will become more accessible to all.

On the brink of a new millennium, we are yet in the midst of a transition from a world dominated by traditional belief systems to an epoch still not clearly defined. We are experiencing some of the confusion and disorientation to be expected anytime longstanding habits and expectations don't seem to square with the demands of new situations. The conditions under which we are living are both exciting and turbulent and we are faced with the challenge of how to

resolve major social issues and of how to live our lives in the century soon to be born. More than ever before, our survival is at risk. Dewey believed we must resist the temptation to escape into the false security of traditional thought patterns, which no longer have credibility. They simply are no longer efficacious; clinging to them will only perpetuate the current crisis and hasten our demise. Instead, with a new breed of philosophers leading the way, we should utilize informed and intelligent methods of inquiry when defining the problems before us, explore possible options, and try solutions we believe will have the best chance of maximizing the values we hold dear.

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Dangerous Beauty: Wives vs. Courtesans, Church vs. State

BY MEERA TAMAYA

Note: The following essay is *not* a movie review; rather, it attempts a comparison between the central conflict in the film *Dangerous Beauty* and the recent impeachment imbroglio.

Set in Renaissance Venice, adapted from the biography *The Honest Courtesan* by Margaret Rosenthal, the movie *Dangerous Beauty* chronicles the fortunes of a famous courtesan who played a crucial role in the survival of Venice as a city state, relatively independent of encroaching Papal authority. As we all know, Venice was the mercantile center of burgeoning Renaissance capitalism and consumerism. The Marxist critic Lisa Jardine has persuasively argued that the Renaissance was as much about conspicuous consumption as about the rebirth of knowledge and the arts. Acquisition and display of worldly and artistic goods were celebrated in Renaissance portraits in which the subjects were often painted surrounded by their luxurious possessions. The movie's stunning cinematography, a visual feast, recreates the hedonistic splendor of sixteenth century Venice with its gilded gondolas, splendid palazzos, paintings, sculptures, opulent clothes and jewels. Venetians worshipped and paid homage to the gods of power and pleasure with an occasional, perfunctory nod to the Christian God of proscriptions.

In this world, the true celebrities were the courtesans, who were analogous to Japanese geishas in that they were valued not only for their bodies, but also for their accomplishments. Veronica Franco, the heroine of *Dangerous Beauty*, has access to libraries from which respectable women are barred, and besides being erudite and well versed in the erotic arts, she is also an expert fencer and a respected poet. Renaissance Venice is comparable to contemporary America on many levels, but especially in its culture of celebrities. At the end of the millennium, America is the undisputed leader of the world, not only in military might, a flourishing artistic and media culture, but also in promoting free, unfettered, capitalism. In our post-modern world, some women achieve celebrity by attaching themselves to sports heroes, movie stars, princes and presidents, and 'work' outside the traditional, religiously mandated constraints on sexuality. These so called "groupies" are comparable to old-style courtesans. Two obvious examples are Camilla Parker-Bowles, the mistress for whom Prince Charles considered a wife well lost after she produced an heir and a spare, and Monica Lewinsky. Admittedly Camilla and Monica do not earn their living by selling sexual favors, but the glamour of a prince and a president may be considered payment in kind, if not in cash. Groupies derive their *raison d'être* from association with powerful men.

Courtesans by profession, like Veronica in Renaissance Venice, or courtesans by inclination, like Camilla and Monica, do not subscribe to bourgeois notions of the sanctity of marriage. Reportedly, when Camilla introduced herself to Charles, she drew his attention to the fact that her great-grandmother, Alice Kepler, was the favorite mistress of his great-grandfather. And in the kind of absurdity the British monarchy, an antediluvian institution, specializes in, Camilla's husband (now an ex) holds the position of Silver Stick in Waiting. Monica's propensity for older, famous men seems to be genetic in origin: her mother has published a book titled *Private Lives of The Three Tenors*, in which she claims to have had an affair with one of them. The fact that she undertook the safekeeping of Monica's infamous blue dress says a great deal about her system of values, which are obviously not those of your average middle-class mother. The resemblance to Renaissance Venice and its courtesan/celebrities is unmistakable, particularly in the role played by them in the ongoing conflict between the church and state, between law and desire, the extreme right and the liberal factions of England and the United States.

First, the movie. Veronica Franco, as played by Catherine McCormack, is a bookish and tomboyish beauty, in love with Marco

Venieri, the son and heir of a wealthy and influential nobleman, played by Rufus Sewell. Although Marco is drawn to her, he explains to Veronica that he cannot marry her, as she has no dowry to offer; his father would never countenance such a marriage: "Marriage is not romantic," he explains "It is a contract, it is about politics: that is why God invented poetry." He has to make a dynastic marriage profitable to Venice and his family; indeed, in a bitter moment Marco intones, "What God and country have joined together, let no love put asunder."

Before she has time to recover from this blow, another, worse shock is dealt her by her mother, who informs Veronica that since her father has drunk away the family fortunes and died leaving them destitute, she has to support the family by becoming a courtesan. Veronica's brother has to buy a commission in the army, and her body is the only commodity which can finance her brother's future. Courtesans, if they are well trained and accomplished, can become very wealthy and very influential, as they are sought after by the most powerful men in Venice. "I know. I was a courtesan, one of the best, before I married your father," says her mother. When Veronica demurs, her mother concedes that a girl with no dowry has one other alternative to a life of prostitution: becoming a nun. She takes Veronica on a tour of a convent; the chilling visit decides the sensuous, freespirted Veronica: she submits to the rigorous training in the erotic and fine arts required of a courtesan. Beautiful, intelligent and spirited, Veronica embraces the life with gusto and becomes a highly prized courtesan whose freedom and influence is envied by wives who are cloistered in their homes.

Before we run away with this highly romanticized concept of courtesans, the film is careful to display the other end of the class structure which existed among them. At the lowest end of the scale, the poorer prostitutes are displayed in cages and have their teeth and bodies prodded and scrutinized before their services are bought. They are also subjected to corporal punishment in public, providing entertainment for sadistic onlookers. At the highest level inhabited by Veronica, she is prized not only for her physical beauty, her expertise at giving pleasure, but also for her erudition, her ability to win improvisatory poetry and fencing contests. Veronica's accomplishments add to the glory of Venice, and she is called upon during negotiations with neighboring powers in times of emergency. For example, when a Turkish invasion is imminent and the Venetians need the help of the King of France to repel the invaders, it is Veronica's brave management of the French King's sado/masochist proclivities which persuades the king to send a fleet of ships to aid

Venice in its war effort. The Doge of Venice declares her a National Treasure.

The class structure among prostitutes and courtesans, which mimicked the established social hierarchy in Venice, is comparable to the classes of women who are, in the parlance of sociology, "sex-workers" in contemporary America. The Monicas and Camillas offer services which wives may or may not provide, and perhaps, more important, without the emotional strings and social obligations attached to the institution of marriage. Like Veronica, Monica and Camilla are not sex workers who walk the streets and are controlled by pimps. Monica is upper middle-class—her father is an oncologist, while Camilla's family is upper-class landed gentry. In her grand-jury testimony Monica stated that she fell in love with Clinton, although she never expected to, but she often referred to him as The Big Creep in her tape-recorded conversations with Linda Tripp. However ambivalent her feelings for Clinton were, the precise nature of the services she offered was undeniably a large part of *her* attractiveness to him, if Clinton's past history is anything to go by. Cut to *Dangerous Beauty*. When the wives of the leading citizens of Venice send for Veronica to ask her if they have had news of their husbands from the war front, they follow up their questions with a more important query: "What keeps our husbands coming back to you, again and again, like pigs to a trough?" Veronica replies by picking up a banana, and declaiming its Latin name, peels it, and swallows it whole in one smooth, scarcely perceptible movement of her deep throat. There is an audible gasp of outrage from the wives. The Latin term hardly dignifies the obscene act, they inform her.

However, a more pragmatic wife asks Veronica to train her own teenage daughter in the arts of a courtesan because, the wife says sadly, "Courtesans enjoy more freedom and influence than wives." By way of answer, Veronica takes the wife to the red-light streets where the poor, disfigured, and destitute prostitutes are left out to die and shows her what happens to most courtesans. As a courtesan she may occupy a larger cage than a wife, but it is still a cage, Veronica points out. Here we come inevitably to the cage as a perfect metaphor for the limitations of the roles prescribed for women by society both in Renaissance Venice and present day America. There are many cages of differing sizes, comfort, even luxury, but for the purposes of this paper, I will consider just one: the cage of celebrity which imprisons both Hillary and Monica, a cage not all that different from the institutional cage of marriage. According to Clinton biographers, his primary motive for marrying the plain and brilliant Hillary was her suitability as a wife for a politician with the highest ambitions. In

Clinton's highly compartmentalized life, the likes of Monica can cater to his satyriasis. Both Hillary and Monica are photographed by *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair*: celebrity and notoriety are interchangeable and often indistinguishable in the free market. In Catholic Renaissance Venice, marriage provides a cage structured by church and state which assures a certain security for respectable women, who are transferred from the custody of fathers to that of husbands. In the comfortable prison of marriage, duty, property, and status are often substituted for pleasure, love, and personal autonomy. In the larger cage occupied by the likes of Veronica and Monica, desire unregulated by church and state can have free play, governed, however, by the cash and power nexus.

Indeed, Veronica's satisfied customers include bishops, senators, kings. The Doge of Venice has cannily managed to keep the city state relatively free of church control by negotiating and catering to the church's own venality. In other words, Renaissance Venice, in its glorious celebration of carnal and artistic pleasures, has managed to retain the earmarks of a secular state, with a marked similarity to Clinton's America before Kenneth Starr began his investigation of the goings on in the White House. Indeed, the reign of pleasure in Renaissance Venice comes to an abrupt and horrifying end when, in the wake of the war against Turkey, plague replaces pleasure with the wages of sin: death. Indeed the Black Death is used by the Inquisition to reassert its control over renegade, hedonistic Venice. It is tempting to speculate that millennial anxieties have played a part in the recent resurgence of the extreme right in America. Of this I shall say more later.

In Venice the first casualty in this war between church and state, between proscription and pleasure, are the courtesans who are brought to trial, summarily condemned, and hanged. Veronica is tried not only as a courtesan, but far more serious, as a witch who has a supernatural hold on men. Veronica's chief accuser and prosecutor is a former poet whom Veronica had publicly humiliated by her own superior gift for instant improvisation of bawdy verse. Worse still, she had trounced him in a duel. This former rival of Veronica is now a self-righteous priest and prosecutor played by Oliver Platt (whose plump cheeks and dimples recall those of Kenneth Starr), who admits that his hatred of courtesans, particularly of Veronica, is in direct proportion to his former frustrated desire for her, because as a poor courtier, he could not afford her services.

When Veronica makes a spirited, eloquent defense of the human need and right to give and receive pleasure, she is told that her very articulateness proves her wickedness: long tongues in women are a

sign of their promiscuity; the church conflates verbal eloquence with sexual profligacy. We need hardly remind ourselves that Shakespeare's women are praised for their silence: Coriolanus addresses his wife as "My gracious silence" and King Lear praises Cordelia for her soft voice: "Her voice was ever soft, / Gentle, and low, an excellent thing in woman." In Renaissance Venice and contemporary America the tongue, the instrument of speech and sensuality, also becomes the sword of rebellion raised against the church's tyranny. The French theorist Michel Foucault has argued that the body becomes the site of control, a visible arena for public discipline and punishment, in the subjugation of its citizens by church and state.

Pleasure is inherently anarchic, and Veronica's tongue, with its expertise in pleasure and poetry, is the ultimate symbol of anarchy, a sort of female phallus, which appropriates to itself what is traditionally male: the prerogatives of power and pleasure, the exercise of which makes men godlike, but for which women are condemned as witches. When the Inquisition is on the point of forcing Veronica to admit she is a witch, her male patrons (the entire assembly of dignitaries), egged on by her lover Marco, now a Senator, rise up in her defense. At this the Doge diplomatically points out that since Veronica is not a witch with supernatural powers, but only a common whore, such base matters need not be the concern of the church, but may be left to the state. With this piece of brilliant casuistry, he saves both Veronica's life and the status of Venice as a secular state.

In an article in the *New York Times Magazine*, Andrew Sullivan, former editor of *The New Republic*, (an openly gay Republican, a sort of living oxymoron), argues that the extreme right is actually subverting the vaunted credo of mainstream Republicans: less government, more freedom. Sullivan makes the point that Kenneth Starr, an avowed fundamentalist, who reputedly reads the Bible every day, has actually managed to put the government in the bedroom. Surely, it is more than a coincidence that Starr and his cohorts' voyeuristic moral fervor coincides with all the other fears rife at the end of the millennium: the breakdown of computers, proliferation of terrorism and, according to blockbuster movies, invasions by aliens, annihilation by comets and dinosaurs. Witch hunts are notoriously triggered by paranoia and exploited by politicians—Senator McCarthy's infamous blacklisting and Congressional hearings against the perceived communist threat, are just two obvious examples. Tolerant and secular, Renaissance Venice becomes prey to the inquisitorial Church precisely when the Black Death nearly decimates its population. Historically, fear and

paranoia have proved efficient triggers for assorted forms of individual and mass insanity.

Time magazine, ever quick to trumpet the *zeitgeist*, put both Starr and Clinton on its January 4, 1999, cover and named them Men of the Year. It is not hard to imagine Janet Reno in drag, playing the wily Doge of Venice, keeping a representative of the religious right and a head of state apart. But as we all know, she signally failed to do so when she gave the prosecutor free rein to run amok. The amusing irony is that the vengeful, self-righteous inquisitor sports a cherubic smile: his is the face of a fulfilled voyeur. Clinton, the usually smiling, doughy President, looks grim, mouth curved downward, eyes glinting, a thwarted satyr, perhaps contemplating bombing the hell out of Iraq as an efficient means of sublimating his frustrations and distracting his critics. Every country deserves its leader, but alas, in a century named *The American Century* by Harold Evans, the American Men of the Year, Starr and Clinton, can engage in a *danse macabre* over a global battlefield. In our postmodern world where difference is obliterated by the indiscriminating and greedy maw of a free market, the accuser and accused appear Janus faced, two sides of the same coin.

Three Poems

BY DAVID RAFFELD

Markers

At the cemetery
I see my landlord's last name
on one of the gravestones and remember
my rent is due.

Aphorism for the Literal

(at Natural Bridge, North Adams, Massachusetts)

Here is an original carving
where a revision in stone
is literally a waste of time.

ERRATA

"Prayer" by David Raffeld

In the last stanza "trace" should be "face"

Prayer

I close the door behind me
my two children asleep
unwinding their dream
of this day and the day before
and what will be ahead.
That they will wake tomorrow
is the miracle of all my waking days.

But when I'm in their room
looking down upon them in the dark,
the moonlight combing the faces
of their uninterrupted sleep
I can think of nothing else that would be them,
that could hold a burning candle to their innocence;
not alphabet, song or sorrow, not even Eden
with all its summer bronze and indolence.

I pray my children will pocket hope
as they pick their way through uncertainty.
Pray they will not settle for the secondhand,
that the wind will bend at their knees,
that rust will not tarnish their souls.
Let their eyes raise hope to their brows
that will deepen and furrow with the light
from ladders that lead to the stars,
their steps waking the earth
as they take their strides.

I pray my children will dance
in the light of all the dangers
they will trace when all their doors
come waving open one by one
and each one of them is a sun.

At the Barber Shop

BY ABBOT CUTLER

Chet's, in Greenfield, Mass. This
is no hairdresser's, no stylist's,
no unisex, blow-dry, pamper me
shop, even though a young woman,
blond hair teased out, greets me
in the doorway, the dark and the rain
coming down outside. She says
she's got time, will cut my hair
before she locks up and goes home.
I sit in one of three half-ton swivel
chairs from the fifties and she begins
with electric clippers to take it back
to something reasonable. Everything
about the place is reasonable. The five
metal chairs with stuffed plastic seats,
the tables with *Field And Stream*
and *Reader's Digest*. No products
to sell, no decor to make me feel
she cares ... about the shop
or me. And why should she?
The shop's her father's ... and me?
But I want to believe she does care
as clumps of my hair fall
onto the shiny sheet I'm under
and slide down onto my lap. The buzz
of the clippers around my ear
brings back an adolescent fear

that I will look foolish, my ears
stranded on a canvas of shorn scalp.
Why am I here? But she is more
adept than that and maybe cares.
She asks me where I live and
what I do and I ask how it is
that she is there cutting hair,
and does she like it? She does
and no, she wouldn't want to go
someplace else. She went
to Springfield, but didn't like it,
moved back. Now, she's using
thinning sheers, big chops that
only take a bit, My sixteen-year-old self
sits back, breathes more easily,
the fear of looking foolish
only momentary. I can tell
her what I want. She went
to school for this, and I, at fifty
must know how I want to appear,
which side my hair is parted on.
She combs it into place, pats it
gently and says, "How's that?"
I look and I look fine, reasonable.
I say that and she sweeps off
the sheet and shakes it out.
The register drawer clangs and slams.
I must have paid. She's putting it
all in order. I'd like to have stayed
a while longer, but I'm on the side-
walk in the November dark
feeling the cold on my bare neck,
car keys in my pocket.

At a Family Reunion in Hawley

BY MARY KENNAN HERBERT

a sacrament
here are snippets
guarded conversations
memories wrapped in an uncomfortable foil
slings and arrows ethnic jokes
fraternal barbs in profusion
tenderness well hidden love restrained
passion denied
what else shall I list
in this beach-stained album
full of our many photographs
your children and mine
line them all up according to size and age
dress them all in souvenir tee-shirts
so I can use up rolls of film
get everybody's mug for eternity don't move
here you will be in a super-size print
I share the negatives with one and all
I will send prints to all on the family
tree but by the time you read this
half of us are divorced and half of us are dead
there are no guarantees
but grandma hugs us again and again
every time we show home movies and here we are
doing this family thing knowing the uselessness
and possible blessings of these chronicles

St. Cloud, 1926

BY THOMAS WESTON FELS

When I was given a poster from the Museum of Modern Art several years ago, by a well-meaning soul who simply wished me to enjoy it, I had no idea that it would eventually prove to be my guide into the field of photography. Perhaps I had an inkling. I was immediately drawn to its dark sepia color, and to the sense it projected of a quiet misty morning in a formal park. I liked the composition; large, dark forms in the foreground, and more delicate, lighter ones behind; verticals against horizontals, with continuing echoes of each. But this is hardly enough to explain the role which this old photograph—and a reproduction at that, has played since the time it was given to me. Although I had had it up at regular intervals for several years, I rarely looked at it without discovering something new: not a new branch, or tree, or path, but a new principle, major compositional device, or discrete interwoven detail of design. In a curious way its rugged simplicity seemed to hide an endless store of elegance and subtlety.

From the beginning, the picture (see illustration, page 35) has been shrouded in mystery for me, mystery which has yielded, partly by conscious application and study, partly by simple familiarity, to some measure of understanding. Bit by bit, like pieces of a puzzle, its various parts have fallen into place. With them has come insight into the artistic issues they represent or are a part of, so that the picture has served as a *koan* for, and its unraveling as the touchstone of, my education in photography.

At first, even the name was a mystery, an unpronounceable cluster of consonants proudly emblazoned beneath the photograph. *Atget*. Eventually I learned to say it: *ahd-jay*. But there was more. Why take a photograph of an almost empty tree, its naked branches nearly devoid of foliage? What was the statue to the left of the tree? What era of dress was represented in its darkened form? Where did the statue end and the tree begin, and was that a feather in the hair of the statue (like a Native American) or a branch which happened to be conjoined with the form of the head? Most of all, I wondered, why in a photograph of such delicate, spectral beauty, the representative image for a major exhibition, was there in the foreground a large pile of gravel?

I thought about that pile of gravel off and on over the years. As I thought about it I noticed other things. In the private grammar of photography, those tiny leaves and fragile branches indicated spring. The effort to reconcile the vibrant yellow-greens of April with the still, dead, brown fixity of a scene which had occurred over fifty years before was like learning to read a foreign language. (Perhaps the pile of gravel had to do with repairing the roads in the park in the spring?)

I noticed that whatever the precise nature of the statue, the salient fact about it was that it was indeed difficult to tell where it ended and the tree began. The photographer had taken care to join them, to link them at a point at which their respective limbs were of a comparable size and shape. The statue and the tree were thus very closely visually related, so closely related that if one began at the tangle of arm and branch, it was actually a surprise to find that, in following them out, one ended as a tree and the other as a piece of stonework. Clearly, *Atget* had had morphology as one of his guiding concepts in the composition of this photograph. (What had the form of the pile of gravel to do with this?)

I noticed that both the statue and the tree with its branches, the most important foreground elements, were reduced by extreme contrast to a screen which was spread over the picture plane, a kind of two-dimensional pattern beyond and through which the rest of the photograph was seen. There was a subtle additional complexity to this in that the screen tended toward three dimensions at its base. (The gravel, more clearly modeled by the light, seemed a link between the fore- and middle ground.)

Finally, I saw that the stone-curbed formal pond, which occupied the central middle ground of the photograph, was carefully aligned to put its borders in gentle diagonals which did not confront the viewer directly, and which emphasized in an indirect, discrete way its

horizontal, planar quality. As my eye traced the border of this watery mirror with its truncated image of foliage, I could only admire the many concurrent levels on which order and meaning had been indicated and suggested without ever having been directly stated.

Yet, there was an exception. How could I have missed it? The photographer had arranged his picture so that one short section of the pond's curb, insignificant in the overall composition of the photograph, pointed directly to the viewer. When I finally saw that single, small element in the design of the photograph, I was greatly reassured. I knew without being told that I had traced the construction of the image to its center; or, to put it another way, that I had been told so by the artist. Once having seen that small detail, the entire composition snapped into place. It was like a key: there was no other way to read the photograph, no other way in.

That small detail spoke to me with amazing clarity. Its startling, because surprising, frankness caused me to step back and reassess what I had seen, to look with more hope and care now that I was sure I was on the right track. What I saw was a portal, an opening in roughly the shape of a door or a window, through which by virtue of the composition itself, I was encouraged to look. The photograph was thus to some extent, perhaps to a large extent, like much of modern art, about looking. It was about art, as well as being art. It had been a portal to me as well. Its major elements had fascinated me long enough to hold my attention until I had unraveled some of its less obvious ones. Still, in the middle of this metaphorical doorway, was a pile of gravel.

Sometime after, I was given a large set of photographs from which to select and organize an exhibition of my own. It was as I looked through these pictures again and again that many of the mysteries of my Atget image fell into place. Eventually they were claimed by the various specific areas of photographic history and technique to which they properly belonged. The darkened corners which arched the top of the image were the legacy of early photographic lenses which distorted at the edge, or whose image did not quite cover the entire glass plate. The sepia ink echoed the color of early photographic prints on paper. The sharpness of detail and careful composition were the product of an era in which a heavy box camera had to be set up, and the results worth the photographer's trouble. (This was an age for which Atget was in fact somewhat late.) The calm morning stillness insured few human intrusions, and little movement in foliage or water.

But what I learned from most was the tradition of documentary photography of which a large group of my photographs were a part.

Because Atget had wanted to photograph in St. Cloud, he had had to work with what was there. He had had to arrange himself, making decisions in three dimensions, in such a way as to bring into meaningful relationship as many of the preexisting aspects of the scene as possible. As a result, certain relationships could be seen to be more intentional and important than others. The tree was a tree and the statue a statue, but by linking them the photographer had created a new abstract form. Many of the other relationships in the photograph, though supportive and relevant, were secondary to this one.. The bare branches of the tree neatly fit the blank space of the sky, filling it almost precisely to the horizon—but not exactly. The arm of the statue was echoed in the tree; the small bit of curb in a distant opening in the trees; the statue in another far away statue; even the trunk of the tree and the statue themselves shared remarkable similarities of form. Yet, on consideration, how could these correspondences possibly be perfect? Rather, Atget's genius seemed to lie not only in the discerning eye which had discovered and organized these correspondences for the viewer, but in a certain ability to present them to us in their natural state, not encumbered but positively amplified by their association with the unavoidable world around them, with, in this photograph for example, such things as a pile of gravel.



ATGET, Eugène.

Saint-Cloud, 9 h. matin, mars 1926. SC:1262

Albumen-silver print, 9 3/8 x 7" (24 x 18 cm).

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Abbott-Levy Collection.

Partial gift of Shirley C. Burden. Copy Print © 1999 The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Figure 1. Maurice Prendergast. *Fantasy*, ca. 1914-15, oil on panel. Williams College Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Charles Prendergast.



Figures and Movement: Art, Dance, and Liberation Theory in the Late Work of Maurice Prendergast

BY TONY GENGARELLY

The late work of Maurice Prendergast (1858–1924), which dates from around the time he moved to New York City in 1914, features decorative oils and watercolors, often with symbolic motifs and abstract pastoral settings. An especially compelling theme involves dancing figures, usually nude females, who frolic in wooded groves and display the classically derived movements of early modern dance. Prendergast's use of these dancing figures is predicated on a compelling personal interest in dancers such as Isadora Duncan and in the liberation philosophy, or *culte de la vie*, espoused by Isadora and other avant-garde artists of his generation. His use of bucolic settings reflects a revival of the ancient pastoral landscape, a classicized primitivism featured in the work of Puvis de Chavannes, Henri Matisse, and Arthur Bowen Davies, modern masters who especially influenced Prendergast. These philosophical and aesthetic elements unite most successfully in a 1914–15 oil panel, *Fantasy* (Williams College Museum of Art, Fig. 1 on page opposite), which is the most significant expression of Prendergast's treatment of dancing figures in the context of an idealistic landscape setting.

This idyllic scene, done in the artist's decorative, Modernist style, contains a group of figures peacefully cavorting around a central waterfall and stream. The nymph-like figures, through their natural and unforced eroticism as well as their freedom of gesture and movement, suggest a utopian vision. Their innocence is underscored by the presence of angelic creatures who, divested of any specific religious association, infuse the scene with a symbolic holiness.

The dancing figures, however, are not just abstract forms, and in their simulation of contemporary dance clearly approximate the gestures of Isadora Duncan. In fact, the positions of *Fantasy's* central dancing figures can be recognized in a group of pastel drawings of Isadora by Maurice Denis. Denis's sketches appeared in *L'Art Decoratif* (August 1913), and a notation in Prendergast's "Paris Sketchbook" (1912-14) indicates that he was familiar with the magazine and may possibly have seen these drawings.

This connection to Isadora, an advocate of uninhibited movement and a free expression of personal and sexual impulses, implies ideas then current on individual and social liberation. The picture's ideological associations become even more evident when one considers a number of developments in Prendergast's personal and artistic life which occurred in the years before the United States entered World War I: first, Prendergast's contact with radical social mores and intellectual discourse, facilitated by his move to New York City in 1914; second, Prendergast's interest in modern dance and his creation of sexually evocative figures which appear in his oils, watercolors, and sketchbooks dating from 1910; third, his preoccupation with abstract landscape, a modern variation of the traditional pastoral, which dominates the late oils. These three developments combine in *Fantasy* to reveal an artist who is more psychologically complex and intellectually engaged than is ordinarily assumed, an artist whose work expresses an important aspect of his period's radical social ideology.

New York Radicals and the Philosophy of Liberation

In November 1914 Maurice Prendergast moved from his native Boston to 50 Washington Street in the heart of Greenwich Village, New York City's Bohemian district, where the artist would remain, except for brief excursions to New England, for the rest of his life. Since 1900 Prendergast had developed an interest in New York, which was punctuated by his participation in the 1908 MacBeth Gallery exhibition of "The Eight" and by his contribution to the controversial 1913 Armory Show. Already a member of Robert

Henri's circle of urban realists and thoroughly aware of the latest artistic currents at home and abroad, Prendergast now located his life and work in the center of the American avant-garde.

During this time New York was alive with social and intellectual crosscurrents that challenged established attitudes toward art, economics, politics, social relations, and personal mores. Inspired by European theorists Henri Bergson and H. G. Wells, New York's "Young Intellectuals" embraced intuition and instinctive behavior as spiritual antidotes to a rationally based social and political outlook. This liberation theory perceived instinct as basically good and primal human behavior as innocent and holy. Modern art expressed these latent forces, and thus aesthetic perception became linked with political and social ideology. Artists rubbed elbows with socialists and anarchists at Mabel Dodge's Fifth Avenue salon. Noted feminist and anarchist Emma Goldman espoused doctrines of sexual freedom practiced by many members of the avant-garde. In an early work, *Drift and Mastery*, published in 1914, even Walter Lippmann challenged current attitudes toward social engineering with the idea that politics ought to be artistically shaped by intuition. The goal of "The Rebellion," the term applied to this loosely fabricated New York movement, was a combination of individual expression and collective harmony, a spiritual awakening which embraced art, sexual freedom, and brotherhood (May 219-139; Brown 3-38; Watson, 122-165).

Having been elected in 1914 president of the Association of Painters and Sculptors, the organization responsible for the 1913 Armory Show where abstract configurations had challenged established notions of form, Prendergast was familiar with those who advocated liberation philosophy and practiced an avant-garde life-style. Robert Henri and Arthur Bowen Davies, two New York-based colleagues who were especially close to Prendergast, were leading exponents of radical freedoms. Henri advocated emancipation from the strictures of conventional art and academic criticism. Davies, who flirted with a Bohemian life-style, was committed as well to innovation in artistic expression. John Sloan too was a member of this artist-intellectual circle. His socialist sympathies were often expressed in graphic medium, and he contributed cartoons to the *Masses*, Max Eastman's contentious radical publication.

Original members of "The Eight," Prendergast, Henri, Sloan, and Davies had defied the National Academy of Design in their 1908 show at the MacBeth Gallery. All had contributed to the 1913 Armory Show, and each had a demonstrated interest in contemporary dance. In fact, Isadora Duncan frequented their weekly gatherings, and Henri's students used members of Isadora's dance troop for models

(Homer 151). Modern dance fit especially well into Henri's liberation ideology, where artistic gesture symbolized universal themes and art had the power to transform life. Of Isadora's dancing he remarked:

[She] carries us through a universe in a single movement of her body. Her hand alone held aloof becomes a shape of infinite significance. Yet, her gesture in fact can only be the stretch of arm or the stride of a normal human body. (Henri 55)

Through her unconstrained dance movements and unconventional life-style Duncan had become a symbol of liberation culture. Henri and Sloan did a number of drawings, prints, and paintings of the dancer (Chapellier Galleries plate 29; Morse 195–99; National Gallery of Art 116, 136). In *Fantasy* Prendergast records Isadora's liberated dancing and strongly suggests her inclinations concerning individual freedom. Davies also knew Isadora Duncan, most likely through the dancer Edna Potter, whom he met in 1902 and with whom he lived for many years under an assumed name (Czestochowski 20). Davies purportedly did a number of drawings of Isadora which were subsequently lost in a fire (Magriel 61). The modern dance influence is unmistakable in his renditions of classical figures in motion such as *Maya, Mirror of Illusions* (1909, The Art Institute of Chicago) and in *Dances* (1914–15, The Detroit Institute of Arts), a cubist variation done as a mural project in the same studio with Prendergast who was then completing *Picnic* (1914–15, The Carnegie Museum of Art) and *Promenade* (1914–15, The Detroit Institute of Arts) (Bolger 55–59; Mathews, *Maurice Prendergast* 36).

Prendergast and Modern Dance

A significant moment in the evolution of modern dance occurred in 1900 when Isadora Duncan visited Paris. The young dancer was already experimenting with a personal style of dance, an organic expression of movement in contrast to the prescribed formulas of traditional ballet. Now, at the Paris World's Fair, Isadora encountered Loie Fuller and most likely saw her perform the "Serpentine Dance." Whirling rhythmically in folds of glittering fabric, Fuller symbolized, according to one description, "a fire above all dogmas." Her symbolic dance conjured up instinctive and elemental forces, the "language of the heart," as François Delsarte had phrased it in his 1887 book on gesture (qtd in Martin 14,17). During this same time Isadora visited the Louvre and encountered archaic-style Greek dance on antique pottery and in fragments of bas-relief sculpture. She was especially

impressed by the natural qualities of the moving figures where every position, "like the waves and the wind . . . presupposes another" (Duncan 54–57). In the following years Duncan developed an expressive style of dance based on symbolic gesture and ancient forms of movement.

Isadora's Greek-style dancing, replete with authentic costumes of loose-fitting fabric, was well received by an audience of artists and critics already sensitized to the potential for ancient styles of movement popularized in Maurice Emmanuel's 1896 book, *The Greek Dance*. When she made a New York appearance in 1909, one commentator recognized the classically-derived choreography: "She wore, as she always does, some drapery of diaphanous material . . . she flitted about the stage in her early Greek way and gave vivid imitations of what one might see on the spherical body of Greek vases" (qtd in Magriel 23).

Isadora, however, had a message to communicate as well. Through her own statements—often delivered to a stunned audience—writings, and dance gestures, Isadora proclaimed what was natural and liberated. For her, the expression of freedom was tied to nudity and especially to the naked female body. Accordingly, she argued that "only movements of the naked body can be perfectly natural" (Duncan 55), and could express what one of her artist admirers described as that "primitive purity" which would restore to humankind its "holy animality" once more (Magriel 53). Speaking very much in the tone of liberation theory, Isadora incorporated the nude female, the "dancer of the future," into a concept of spiritual renewal:

She will realize the mission of woman's body and the holiness of all its parts . . . She will dance the body emerging again from centuries of civilized forgetfulness, emerging not in the nudity of primitive man, but in a new nakedness, no longer at war with spirituality and intelligence, but joining with them in glorious harmony. (Duncan 63)

This description relates very well to the nude dancing figures in *Fantasy*.

Prendergast may well have seen an actual performance by Isadora, but even if he did not, he would certainly have been aware of her dance movements through exposure to the work of contemporary visual artists. Auguste Rodin, whose electrifying sculptural groups also inspired Isadora Duncan at the 1900 Paris World's Fair, did a series of drawings of Isadora while she moved for him in his

studio (Magriel 43). Later, Rodin's dance figures were incorporated into an exhibition of his drawings. In 1908 and again in 1910, they were shown at Alfred Stieglitz's Photo-Secession Gallery, "291," in New York. The drawings were also featured at a Boston gallery in 1909 and appeared as well in a 1911 edition of the Stieglitz publication *Camera Work*. Both "291" and *Camera Work* were familiar to Prendergast, as was the work of Photo-Secession artist Abraham Walkowitz. Walkowitz, who began depicting Isadora Duncan around 1909, eventually completed hundreds of drawings of the dancer's gestures and movements (Magriel 52; Bluemner 6).

More significantly, Prendergast was familiar with the dance pictures of Henri Matisse, whose stylistic influence is apparent in the work of the American artist after 1912 (Mathews, "Prendergast and Modernism," 41-42). In 1905-06 Matisse created *The Joy of Life* (Barnes Foundation, Merion, Pa., Fig. 2 and Detail, page 43), a pastoral landscape with nude figures doing a circle dance in the background. Then, from 1909-11, Matisse produced a series of dance paintings based on the earlier fragment's circular movement. Despite the classical antecedents of *The Dance* sequence, the gestures of Matisse's figures are clearly modern, most likely after the style of Isadora Duncan (Cuno 503-04; Martin 24). Prendergast certainly knew of Matisse's dance images, even though his exposure may have been indirect: through the background detail in *The Joy of Life*, which was published in a 1912 edition of *Camera Work* (page 43); or through the Armory Show, where Prendergast evidently saw Matisse's *Nasturtiums and the Dance, I*, a still-life that includes a variation of *The Dance* in the background. Along with several other works by the French master featured at the 1913 show, Prendergast copied *Nasturtiums and the Dance, I* into a sketchbook ("Armory Show Sketchbook," 1913). Prendergast's sketchbooks also confirm a more direct link with Isadora Duncan. Along with his aforementioned 1913 notation related to the drawings of Maurice Denis, Prendergast made his own drawing of Isadora around the same time ("Japanese Sketchbook," Fig. 3, page 44); the sketch is evidently based on a popular image of the dancer by Fritz Von Kaulbach which appeared on the cover of *Die Jugend* magazine in 1904 (Fig. 4, page 45).

Prendergast's artistic expression of modern dance is further demonstrated in a series of large, single-sheet drawings of dancing figures, which he did between 1912 and 1915; for these, Prendergast probably worked from a model moving for him in his studio. Not really concerned with dance as performance, these drawings focus on gestures and specific movements representative of contemporary archaic-style dancing. Two drawings in the collection of the Williams

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Images on the original page are

Figure 2. Henri Matisse. *The Joy of Life*, 1905-
06, oil on canvas. Barnes Foundation.

and

Figure 3. Detail. *The Joy of Life*.



Figure 3. Maurice Prendergast. *Isadora Duncan* from "Sketchbook #17" (*Japanese Sketchbook*), ca. 1913–15, pencil on paper. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Gift of Mrs. Charles Prendergast in honor of Perry T. Rathbone. Microfilm Roll no. 3584, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.



Figure 4. Fritz von Kaulbach. *Isadora Duncan*, 1902, pastel drawing reproduced as the cover for *Die Jugend*, 1904.

College Museum of Art, *Dancer #1* and *Three Figures* suggest Isadora Duncan's liberated movements and archaic-style dancing. Another drawing, *Dancer #2* (1912–15, University of Iowa Museum of Art, Collection of John J. Brady, Jr., Fig. 5, page 47) also recalls Isadora's style of dance. Abraham Walkowitz captures a similar movement in his 1909 depiction of the dancer (Magriel 49). Most importantly, the gestures and especially the nudity of *Dancer #2* connect to the symbolically charged principal dancing figures in the 1914 panel *Fantasy* (especially the second figure from the left).

In addition to the classically derived gestures of Isadora Duncan and her school of modern dance, the inspiration for Prendergast's nude females in motion whose images appear in *Fantasy* and in other works dating from this period is partially explained by his exposure to the sexual emancipation then current in New York's Bohemian circles. Isadora Duncan espoused it; feminist Emma Goldman proclaimed it; Prendergast's close friend Arthur Davies lived it; and social scientists such as Elsie Clews Parsons (*Social Freedom*, 1915) advocated it in their attacks on marriage and social taboos. Moreover, Prendergast had a personal interest in the subject of sex and sexual relations which can be gleaned from some very provocative fragments in his art.

A careful look at some of Prendergast's oils discloses a variety of instances where the artist employs erotic imagery. For instance, the 1910–13 *Bathers by the Sea* (Williams College Museum of Art) contains a nude couple embracing under the trees behind the principal foreground figures. *Promenade* (1914–15) features the typical Prendergast park scene except for two young women, located near and on a centrally positioned bench, who seductively reveal their legs. This alluring pose, often associated with tarts, seems to have fascinated the artist, for it appears several times in his sketchbooks of the same period ("Sketchbook #19").

The sketchbooks especially reveal the full spectrum of Prendergast's sexual imagination. Interspersed with the typical beach scenes and coastal landscapes, Prendergast's erotic drawings appear to be independent musing, recorded at odd times on a random empty page of an already completed sketchbook. From the extant images—some apparently have been defaced or ripped out—Prendergast demonstrates an interest in the strip-tease ("Paris Sketchbook," Fig. 6, page 48) and in figures whose positions imply sexual activity ("Sketchbook #5"; "Sketchbook #24"; "Paris Sketchbook"). Several depictions of sexual intercourse appear on these pages, their focus on genitalia reminiscent of Japanese *shunga* prints or German expres-



Figure 5. Maurice Prendergast. *Dancer #2*, ca.1912–15, pencil on paper. The University of Iowa Museum of Art, Gift of John J. Brady, Jr.



Figure 6. Maurice Prendergast. Page from the "Paris Sketchbook," ca. 1911–14, pencil, pen and ink wash on paper. Williams College Museum of Art, Gift of Mrs. Charles Prendergast.

sionist drawings ("Armory Show Sketchbook"; "Sketchbook #29"; "Sketchbook #40").

As private journals, the sketchbooks reveal a more active sexual imagination, portray a more sensuous female than ever emerges in Prendergast's oils or watercolors. Nevertheless, rather than engaging in a kind of artistic voyeurism, Prendergast in the erotic sketchbook drawings appears to be groping for an aesthetic resolution of very powerful personal feelings. Many of the erotically charged scenes appear to be derived from images on Greek pottery no doubt inspired by cultural explorations in New York, Paris, and Venice ("Classic Subjects Sketchbook"; "Paris Sketchbook"). Perhaps, along with Isadora Duncan, Prendergast saw in his interpretation of ancient images the way to a freer sexuality unencumbered by shame or guilt (Mazo 44).

The modern dance motif, however, proved to be one of the more successful vehicles through which Prendergast could express his sexual imagination. For instance, the sketchbook "stripper" (fig. 6, page 48), converted to a prancing nymph, appears in a 1912-15 watercolor, *The Bathers* (Collection of Mr. and Mrs. C. V. Nalley, III). The play of her gown and body faintly echoes in *Dancer #2* while it resounds more emphatically in the dancing figures of the 1914 *Fantasy* (note particularly the second figure from the right). Through his powerfully invested symbols of women in motion, Prendergast fashioned his own response to the artistic and intellectual community's call for sexual emancipation.

Prendergast and the Modern Pastoral

In *Fantasy* Prendergast uses a modern variation of the pastoral landscape as the setting for his symbolically charged dancing figures. The traditional pastoral, which traces its origin to the work of Renaissance Venetian masters Giovanni Bellini, Giorgione, and Titian, is a settled landscape located between wilderness and urban civilization, and inhabited by amorous figures who celebrate their love for nature through poetry, song, and dance. The natural setting elevates the common elements in the scene transforming them into an expression of spiritual harmony. In Giorgione's *Concert Champêtre* (c. 1510, Musée du Louvre), for instance, nudity is natural and thereby accords the foreground nymphs a "higher spiritual status." Inspired by the *Eclogues* of Virgil, the pastoral's message of aesthetic delight and spiritual harmony is symbolically communicated through figures and setting, tone and gesture (Rosand 21-81; Cafritz 83-111).

Beginning with the symbolist paintings of Puvis de Chavannes in

the late nineteenth century, modern artists such as Matisse appropriated the idealized pastoral landscape and its classically derived imagery to communicate feelings of tranquility and aesthetic delight; to manifest freedom from social, political, and industrial constraints (Elderfield 97–102; Gowing 231–44). Prendergast's connection to this tradition is directly documented in "Sketchbook #13" where he executed a drawing after Puvis's *Pleasant Land* (1882, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Ct.).

Since gestures and movement can express inner states of mind, the pastoral's modern variation often uses dance to communicate a symbolic message. Arthur Davies conveys the transience of existence in *Without Pause, Enters, Touches, Passes* (1927, Worcester Art Museum) where monumental female nudes move in synchronized rhythm across the frieze of life. In *The Joy of Life*, where Matisse implies a retreat from the contemporary urban-industrial world, the background dancing figures project a liberated spirit into an otherwise contemplative picture (Elderfield 99; Benjamin 312–15). This anarchistic undercurrent so often symbolized by the dance motif, is explained by social critic Margaret Anderson in a 1916 article for the *Little Review*: art and anarchism are synonymous, because they "are in the world for the same . . . reason," to free the mind through intuitive insight from the bonds of established thought and, hence, to help liberate the individual from dependence on social and political institutions (May 306).

Prendergast adopted a number of approaches to the modern pastoral, combining the allegorical with the exotic in a series of decorative tapestry paintings. Overall, these idealistic landscapes suggest a world apart, one where love and art purify and liberate all which has been sullied and constrained by human institutions. In the late pastoral landscapes Prendergast conveys a decidedly anti-industrial message (Durkin). He also uses the pastoral symbolically to represent ideas of social liberation which matched his own inclinations toward a freer personal expression. Where he employs the dance motif as a central image, his figures' movements clearly derive from the ancient sources reflected in modern dance. Two watercolors, *Dancing Figures No. 1* (1910–13, private collection) and *Bathers* (1912–15, collection of Mrs. Charles Prendergast) feature the energetic, even frenzied movements of a Dionysian revel; whereas, the cadenced *Sea Maidens* (1910–13, Private Collection) and *Five Figures* (1910–13, The Brooklyn Museum) simulate a ritualistic offering.

As we have indicated, however, the best example of Prendergast's incorporation of modern dance gestures with the pastoral theme is the 1914–15 *Fantasy*. The symbolic power of the central moving

figures draws on their association with the erotic imagery of early modern dance, especially the choreography of Isadora Duncan. While expressing ideas of social and sexual freedom associated with Isadora, Prendergast relates his personal concerns as well; projects them onto the nude dancing figures whose erotic overtones are purified in typical pastoral fashion as they cavort through a harmonious setting of innocent delight. This elevation of earthly impulses through a celebration of art and beauty can be glimpsed too in the philosophical statements of Robert Henri and in this 1906 tribute to Isadora by Gordon Craig:

This is what she dances—
Never yet has she shown dark or unbearable sorrow—
Always sunshine's around her—
Even the little shadows disappear
and flee when she passes (qtd in Magriel 64–65)

Celebratory in tone and harmoniously balanced with activity and calm, with warm reds and cool blue colors, Prendergast's *Fantasy* is a beautiful dream, one which reverberates contemporary ideological concerns familiar to the artist, and, through the use of the modern dance motif, is an expression of the artist's erotic imagination, complex personal feelings resolved in the context of aesthetic delight.

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Memories of the Civil Rights Movement

A Review Essay of
The Children by David Halberstam.
Random House, 1998

BY FRANCES JONES-SNEED

A human being has roots by virtue of his real, active and natural participation in the life of a community . . . this participation is a natural one in the sense that it is automatically brought about by place, conditions of birth, profession and social surroundings. Places, and particularly home, are seen, therefore, as the foundation of our identity. Given the acceptance of place as important, a sense of place is seen as a necessary feature of individual identity. (Weil, p. 72)

David Halberstam's recent work, *The Children*, demonstrates why he is a Pulitzer Prize winning author. In fact, this book is Halberstam's nostalgic journey back to the beginning of his journalistic career in the South. During the Civil Rights Movement he became accustomed to covering the topics that became front-page headlines. Later, he would win the Pulitzer prize for covering the Vietnam war. It was, however, the coverage of the sixties' movement in the South that was at the heart of Halberstam's journey toward the prize-winning journalist he is today.

This book reads like the reminiscences of a prodigal son who returns home after a long absence. Halberstam tells the story of eight

people that he first met in Nashville, Tennessee, in the early sixties— young African-Americans from all over the country who would by their actions change forever the relationship between blacks and whites in the South. They were only a few years younger than Halberstam and from the beginning their dedication and commitment awed him. This book demonstrates that he is still impressed by their commitment. These relationships form the core of the stories told in the book.

To explain the magnitude of the changes that took place in the South in the sixties, Halberstam begins by providing background information on each of the eight people. The South serves as a backdrop for social change. It is the central place that cements these people and their story of struggle and commitment. The South is one of those places that evoke memories of a base upon which millions of humans were set down to realize their possibilities. It became a place from which to discover the world, a destination to which they could return. (Relph, p. 27) The South served as a home for Africans when they were first brought to this country as slaves. Even in the face of unequal treatment after slavery, blacks remained in the South through the height of the Civil Rights Movement. The South became a battleground in the nineteenth century and again in the twentieth century—both periods centered on equal rights for blacks.

African-Americans understood the drawbacks of the South as a place to live, yet still chose to live there. Indeed, even those who discount the theory of African survivals will attest to the fact that Africans were torn from their social, economic, and cultural place and brought to this country as unwilling workers. Their seasoning or acculturation to America came early. This foreign place was not easy for them because they were also separated from their families and all semblance of their culture, yet few documents that detail this loss exist. The few records that remain detail that they did miss their homeland (Africa) as other humans would under similar situations. They also understood that their memories of home had to be preserved in order for them to survive in the new world. They adopted the South as their new home and invested all of their energy into making it a place to live.

After slavery, many southern blacks decided to migrate north because many things about the South, such as crop failures, illnesses, unequal treatment, injustices, harassment and the inequities of tenant farming made it difficult for them to stay. Despite these inequities most African-Americans stayed in the South.

It is difficult to understand blacks' deep attachment to the South. One explanation is offered by a former Virginia slave who said: "I

been here a long time, and I ain't tired of staying." (Sobel, p. 95) After all, it was their home, the place that they knew best and the only place most had lived. Many ex-slaves moved around after the Civil War but most stayed close to what they called their "homeplace" in the South. "Slaves . . . were outside the system of landownership. They were on the land, tilled the land, and were generally given private gardens to cultivate to supplement their food, but the land did not belong to them legally." (Sobel, p. 95) The same was true after emancipation but southern blacks had a spiritual attachment to the southern land. They believed that humans could not really own land because, in a spiritual sense, only God owned land and humans were only temporary caretakers. These legal and religious complications did not cloud blacks' sense of spiritual and physical attachment to the South. Those who migrated to the north or west still remembered it and visited it and sent their children back to get to know it.

In the sixties the South became a staging ground for hundreds of young people who had never been in the South. It became a better place to live for those who lived there and it became a place of hope for those who had left it behind. After the Civil Rights Movement, every American could value the South not for the place it was but for what it promised to be. The young blacks that Halberstam writes about were excited by these possibilities. The South was a good place to claim as home because if the South could be changed then so could the nation. The South became a place where people exhibited great courage and a place where the American experiment of freedom was once again tested after a hundred years.

Diane Nash is one of the eight people that David Halberstam writes about in his book. He introduces us to just eight out of the hundreds of young people who asked, "what can I do?" They were important in redeeming the South for anyone who claimed it as a home. It is a book that confirms that ordinary people were at the heart of the Movement. He writes, "I can think of no occasion in recent postwar American history when there has been so shining an example of democracy at work because of the courage and nobility of ordinary people." (Halberstam, p. 7)

This was a time when African-Americans and their allies changed the face of the South. When one thinks of the South in contemporary society, one name emerges: Martin Luther King, Jr. Yet the story of the sixties and what became known as the "Movement" was much more than Martin Luther King's story. As Diane Nash states, "If people think that it was Martin Luther King's movement, then today the young people are more likely to say, 'Gosh, I wish we had a Martin Luther King here today to lead us.' If people knew how that

movement started, then the question they would ask themselves is, what can I do?" (Garrow, p. 3)

I am always cautious about any account of events in the South during the sixties and of the people who participated in them because I lived in the South at the height of the Movement. Most people who came of age during that time can relate stories about their own brand of activism. Although it was a time of change, courage and vision it has also become an often romanticized and exploited time.

Halberstam's sweeping saga does not just dabble in sixties folklore—it is the real stuff. He was there as a young journalist to witness the beginning of something historic. Although he was there as an eyewitness to these events, his emphasis is on the story of the activists because he convinces the reader that they were the important ingredients that changed the South and the country. So *The Children* is as much Halberstam's memoir as it is about the eight activists he covers.

At first glance it is reminiscent of Howard Zinn's *SNCC: The New Abolitionists*, the first history of the group of young college students who would change the face of the South. Zinn's book was more about the organization of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and how it developed from its beginnings as a student arm of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in 1960 through its maturing years in 1964. Halberstam's book is about one contingent of that organization, the Nashville group—how they evolved as leaders of the movement, how they merged with other groups and how they have fared since their days of glory.

Halberstam has entitled his book *The Children* because of the relatively young ages of the participants—all of them were under thirty. Yet the young people who joined the Movement after this first heady period thought of these people as heroes and some even thought of King as the grand old man. The people that Halberstam writes about set the stage for others to discuss the cultural and political issues of the time. After the sit-ins, the freedom rides, the voter registration drives and the protest of the Vietnam War, what was left for future activists?

By the summer of 1966 the Movement as Halberstam describes it was almost over: the philosophy of non-violent protest was being questioned within the organizations that cooperated for the major changes of the sixties, and many hard-won alliances were irretrievably broken. The summer of 1966 was the beginning of the end of the first phase of the Movement. It was the year that John Lewis stepped down from the chairmanship of SNCC and was replaced by the more radical Stokely Carmichael. It was the year that "black and

white together," one of the lines from the old spiritual "We Shall Overcome," was ridiculed. It was the beginning of the movement called "Black Power" and black cultural nationalism was in vogue.

Indeed, Halberstam has captured a precious time of hope and commitment that may never be repeated. He has explained what the heart of the Movement was all about: Young, bright, often-naïve young people who had the faith and courage that by their sheer will they could change a world. Halberstam writes about that time: "The journey they were beginning had started with a limited enough objective: an assault on the segregated lunch counters in Nashville. As that assault grew it created among these young people its own new equation: Each victory they gained demanded a further step; the totality of segregation as it existed in the American South." (Halberstam, p. 8)

A reader interested in this time period will find this book worth reading because of the various themes that are explored. One of the major themes of Halberstam's book is about unrewarded sacrifice. Nowhere is that theme more evident than in the story of Diane Nash. Her story is especially compelling because she and other early leaders of the Movement became role models for younger blacks in the South and the North. Nash's leadership of the Nashville group in the sit-ins became well-known lore of the Movement.

Diane Nash led the Nashville Group to victory. The group desegregated the Nashville lunch counters when Diane debated the local mayor on the court house steps. John Lewis remembered that day vividly: "Diane's performance had been nothing less than brilliant. She had managed to get the mayor to move past his politics to the very core of his humanity." (Halberstam, p. 237)

When a number of student groups across the south came together to form SNCC it was naturally believed that Nash would be selected as the chairperson, but she was not; Marion Barry was. The reasons for this are varied, ranging from Nash's reluctance to attract attention to herself as well as problems about her gender. "Diane was a woman, and there was some sensitivity to that. The Movement always had a powerful undercurrent of male chauvinism, and it was believed by some of her friends that this worked against her." (Halberstam, p. 219)

In a later interview Nash did not seem to regret not being chosen chairperson. She continued her work with the group because the Movement, in Nash's estimation, was always more important than any one person's ego. Rather, it was the betrayal of the personal relationship that she forged with fellow activist and later husband James Bevel that seemed more important to her. She recalled: "I was

the sole support of our family because my former husband, the children's father, decided that he did not want to hold a job." (Halberstam, p. 533) She admired him for his commitment to the Movement; he was a brilliant man, but he failed to see that he also had a commitment to support his children. This failure of the extension of freedom into their own personal relationship and Bevel's relationship with his children haunted Diane Nash. After all, were not their children inheritors of this hard-won freedom? Should they not have the benefit of a loving supportive father? Were not the same moral standards that they implored white America to adhere to also the same principles that Bevel should follow?

Halberstam's book reads like a bold saga of people's triumphs and failures, and because Halberstam is a skilled storyteller the reader is caught up in the story. Diane Nash's story captures our imagination because hers is a story of success, failure and resignation that anyone would find hard not to comprehend. Nash—a northerner, beauty queen finalist, smart, savvy, committed to the Movement—ends up struggling to rear two children alone without the benefit of an education. After one completes this saga it is not pity one feels for Diane Nash but tremendous respect. She was perhaps less successful, financially, than her other better-known colleagues. John Lewis is now a Member of Congress; Marion Barry, the former Mayor of Washington, D.C.; Bernard Lafayette, holder of a Harvard doctorate, heads up his former seminary; Rodney Powell and Gloria Johnson, married and divorced, became medical doctors; and Curtis Murphy became a high school principal. (Halberstam, p. 719) Yet it is Nash who on the thirty-fifth anniversary of that event was the essence of the group when she stood up to the Mayor of Nashville and further it was Nash who summarized what those years had been about for the group. At the anniversary "she had spoken not so much for herself on that day when she confronted Ben West, she said, but for all of her colleagues in the Movement, and perhaps even more, for all of those black people who had gone before and who had never been given a chance to speak or who had never been listened to." (Halberstam, p. 719)

Halberstam asked Diane Nash whether the times made people act in extraordinary ways or whether it was extraordinary people that made extraordinary times? Her answer was that extraordinary times make extraordinary people. They were just people who were in the right place at the right time. The children of Halberstam's book are ordinary people who have paid a high price for the freedom of a generation of black and white Americans. Halberstam's book gives me a chance to ponder my identity, my place in America, a chance to

reminisce about from whence I came. It gives me a chance to call myself a southerner, a Mississippian, an African-American, a woman who has benefited from their sacrifices to be free enough to claim any place I wish as home. The story of these people gives us all the chance to know that we can be extraordinary people if we make similar commitments in our own lives and dare to ask the question that Diane Nash posed: "What can I do?"

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BOOK REVIEW

History and Identity—A Creative Union?: Lessons from Israelis and Palestinians

Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Palestinian National Consciousness by Rashid Khalidi. Columbia University Press, 1997

Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition by Yael Zerubavel. University of Chicago Press, 1995

BY SUMI COLLIGAN

Despite what appears to be an increase in the global clash of cultures, a ray of hope can be gleaned from recent studies analyzing the emergence of national cultures and nationalist identities. The ray stems from the fact that the authors are themselves members of cultures that have been engaging in such conflict and yet demonstrate a willingness to examine their own nations or national claims as products and processes of "imagined communities." As such, they eschew any claims to an ardent nationalism because they recognize such claims would contradict their own endeavors. These efforts involve uncovering their own national memories as historically contingent inventions, riddled with inconsistencies, and continually unfolding.

The two works I have in mind are Yael Zerubavel's *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* and Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Palestinian National Consciousness*. I have selected these works to commemorate Israel's recent fiftieth anniversary. Whereas this anniversary may have signaled, for some, a cause for celebration and triumph, and for others an occasion for mourning, I emphasize commemoration as an opportunity to reassess the past in order to forge an opening for new beginnings. History need not mean destiny if we can strip it of

essentialized¹ qualities that have been imputed to it. While for some the demise of master narratives may suggest a loss of control, instability, and an undermining of self-assuredness, I see in it an opportunity to escape the rigidity and fixity of bounded views that have contributed to current impasses in the global political arena.

Yael Zerubavel, the first author mentioned above, is an Israeli with a background in folklore who teaches modern Hebrew literature at the University of Pennsylvania. She first became interested in exploring the socio-historical roots of her own national culture when she came to the United States and discovered that it was difficult for her to participate in American Jewish ritual practices because they differed significantly from practices with which she was raised and had assumed to be part of a timeless and uniform Jewish tradition. She felt further compelled to examine the assumptions and impulses that contributed to the making of this tradition when she was assisting her daughter with a school project on family history only to discover that a family memoir of her great-grandfather began with his immigration to Palestine and made no mention of his Eastern European origin.

Rashid Khalidi, the second author, is a Palestinian who is a scion of several East Jerusalem notable families, teaches Middle Eastern history at the University of Chicago, and has been an adviser to several post-Oslo Palestinian delegations in their negotiations over peace accords with Israel. Khalidi states that, for his own part, his research in Lebanon on decisions made by the PLO during the 1982 War and his first-hand experience with helping to delineate the contours of an emergent national formation, caused him to come face-to-face with an ever changing conceptualization that the Palestinians held of themselves as a people.

To some extent, the goals of the works are quite distinct. While Zerubaval is trying to deconstruct Israeli secular culture by demonstrating how collective memory selectively refashions past events in order to conform to contemporary agendas, Khalidi is attempting to offer support for the existence of the Palestinian people as a refutation of Golda Meir's 1969 statement that, "There was no such thing as Palestinians . . . They did not exist" (quoted in Khalidi, 147). His thesis reveals that while nation and state are often thought of as a single entity (as in nation-state), national consciousness can develop in the absence of statehood. Since statehood has been achieved in one instance and has yet to come to full fruition in the other, the counterposing perspectives of these two authors are not particularly surprising. Rescuing "repressed history" has different implications for those who speak louder from the privileged position of the victors or with the muted voices of the losers.

In her beginning chapters, Zerubavel writes about the temporal and spatial structure of Zionist thought as one that collapses Antiquity with Modern National Revival and erases or silences 2000 years of Exile to create a sense of continuity between the past and the present, thereby essentializing the bond between the Jewish people and land, language, and sovereignty (a strategy that was especially pronounced during the prestate period and early years of statehood). For example, she explores in depth how the siege at Masada and the Bar-Kokhba revolt, both instances in which Jews attempted to fend off the encroaching Romans, are used to argue for and illustrate a timeless seam with the contemporary Israeli nation and military. In so doing, she notes that the denial of Exile helped contribute to the misconception or propaganda that Palestine was uninhabited by Palestinians since denying Exile also meant lack of recognition that this Biblical land had a subsequent history and occupants following Antiquity. Additionally, such denial devalued or dismissed any common threads with Jewish Diaspora experiences or cultures since Jewish immigrants were encouraged to consider themselves "reborn."

Khalidi, on the other hand, attempts to show that even prior to the arrival of Zionists at the turn of the century, there was an awareness among the inhabitants of Palestine concerning the sacredness of Jerusalem as a Muslim site and a regional identity crystallized by the memory of the Crusades—a memory in contemporary times that has been conflated with European and Zionist incursions into the area, particularly following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Nonetheless, he is not attempting to offer evidence of a primordial and totalizing Palestinian identity, but rather to portray the interweaving of cultural continuities and overlapping identities as well as points of disjuncture and fragmentation. Moreover, these disjunctures and fragments are not attributed solely to silences and divisions imposed by external domination, but also to internal cleavages. For example, he acknowledges that land was sold to Zionist settlers by absentee Palestinian landlords (although substantial amounts were also sold by outsiders); that Palestinian peasant revolts in the earlier part of the century were indicative of an awareness among peasants that their interests conflicted with those of Jewish settlers and those of Arab merchants from Damascus, Jaffa, Haifa, and Beirut who were purchasing large tracts of previously common land used for agriculture and grazing; and that members of the Arab League in Haifa told Palestinians to flee in the wake of the 1948 War (as did many Israeli leaders).

Nonetheless, he does hope to challenge those who would delegitimize Palestinian claims to sovereignty by pointing to periods when Palestinian identity was not outwardly in evidence (for ex-

ample, in the decade and a half following the 1948 War) or by dismissing Palestinian national consciousness as unauthentic simply because it emerged largely in response to Zionism. Indeed, he counters such accusations by postulating (as have others) that identity is, at least in part, relational and "can be fully understood only in the context of a sequence of other histories, a sequence of other narratives" (9). Thus the weakening or enfeeblement of identity may simply signal a period of taking stock and of watchfulness and/or a momentary need to focus exclusively on the demands of external contingencies and to seek a "time out" in order to regroup.

Zerubavel, in discussing the making of Israeli national culture, also highlights its oppositional character. If Jews in Exile were overdetermined by external conditions and forces, acted upon, rendered passive, martyred, and scapegoated by virtue of their placement in restricted occupations, then the "new Hebrew" would be strong, heroic, a pioneer in the wilderness clearing the land for planting, would control his own destiny, and be willing to defend his people against all odds (I use the term "he" here because these images are rooted in a masculinist construction). The construction of these oppositional images contributes to underscoring instances of resistance in Antiquity while playing down the outcomes (in the case of Masada, collective suicide, and in the case of the Bar-Kokhba revolt, massive defeat). It also minimizes attention to the Holocaust (while at the same time organizing rescue missions and extending safe haven to its refugees) whose victims were cast only as "victims" and not also as courageous survivors.

Thus, despite the contradictory aims of "constructing" or "deconstructing," both authors are in remarkable agreement concerning the dynamics involved in constituting identity and the importance that giving shape to one's own historical narrative plays in giving direction to one's own future. In substantiating their arguments, both emphasize methods by which a sense of "horizontal comradeship" (to use Benedict Anderson's term, 7) has been promoted and instilled (through, e.g., literary writing, newspapers, and schools) among Israelis and Palestinians. But, of equal significance, they stress that memory and agency are not the singular domain of political and literary elites. In so doing, it is possible to discern how ideological inconsistencies in nationalist hegemonies give way to alternative hegemonies or popular undercurrents. For example, Zerubavel notes that the secular national myth of Masada was at once weakened by the integration of the Holocaust into national memory following the Eichmann trial² as well as by Masada's commercialization and increased accessibility; and strengthened by the discovery of a synagogue on the premises and by the political manipulation of national

insecurities in the aftermaths, variously, of the 1973 War, the War in Lebanon, and the growing tensions in the Occupied Territories. These anxieties have contributed to a nascent (or no longer so nascent) "traditionalism" couched in nationalist-religious terms (Exile is back, but not in a guise that it would itself recognize). The slipperiness of hegemony that allows it both to disappear and reappear is best captured by the Israeli writer A.B. Yehoshua in observing, "Masada is no longer the historic mountain near the Dead Sea but a mobile mountain that we carry on our back anywhere we go" (quoted in Zerubavel, 194).

Finally, I would like to return to the issue of undercurrents. Postcolonial theorists have commented that in many postcolonial states, nationalist fervor and anticipation have given way to cynicism and disillusionment. While neither Israel (because it combines elements of postcoloniality such as freedom from the British and escape from European genocide and oppression with elements of a settler culture) nor Palestine (because it has not yet entered a stage of postcoloniality) fully conforms to postcolonial criteria, it is still instructive to consider current trends in both societies in light of a postcolonial moral crisis. For instance, Zerubavel investigates the role of humor as a form of social protest. She explains how the siege of Tel Hai in 1920, an event celebrated by Israeli nationalists as a display of great heroism because the commander Trumpeldor defended this sparsely populated northern Jewish settlement singlehandedly (quite literally, since Trumpeldor had lost one of his arms while serving in the Czarist army) against Arabs who were searching for French sympathizers, has recently been turned on its head. Stories abound that Trumpeldor's dying words were not, "It is good to die for your country," but rather a juicy Russian curse, and that the statue of Trumpeldor with a lion (the first statue erected to mark Israeli sovereignty) was not a symbol of national strength, not an indigenous wild animal that was tamed, but a domesticated one located in a nearby Egyptian zoo. Such humor clearly calls nationalist bravado into question. Likewise, Khalidi emphasizes that the *intifada*, the Palestinian uprising of 1987–1992, was as much a grassroots protest against the PLO leadership as it was against the Israeli Occupation itself. Palestinian civil disobedience in the West Bank and Gaza alerted leaders in exile that they could no longer define the discourse or set the strategies for Palestinian liberation because they were ineffectual and not grounded in the lived experience of the Occupation. Thus moral crisis need not be destructive and may budge people to be more receptive to novel solutions.

In short, I find a review of these works most valuable because they prove that national self-scrutiny does not necessarily lead to annihila-

tion. If identity is indeed processual rather than given, then identity politics should focus on dialogue, transaction, and exchange, not identity as a zero sum game. While essentialized "ties that bind" may cement solidarity, mobilize activism, and ward off challenges from the outside world, those very same ties may become constraints, even strangleholds. Whereas both Israelis and Palestinians have promulgated positions that rest upon a mutual denial of the other, there are nonetheless increasing indications of a growing recognition that the successful survival of each may require a degree of mutual acknowledgement. Some of my critics might argue that this scrutiny is simply the indulgence of isolated academics or point to the considerable influence of nationalist-religious movements on both sides of the divide that has served to undermine recent peace initiatives. I would counter that although such movements need to be taken seriously and monitored closely, it is equally important to pay attention to the formal and informal mechanisms through which individuals and groups situated at various strata of each society contest the validity and rigidity of exclusivist and exclusionary nationalisms and express a willingness to embrace a more uncertain (but perhaps more secure) future.

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NOTES

¹ To "essentialize" means to impute intrinsic and uniform qualities, a natural essence, or primordial, timeless roots to social categories and processes. It suggests that such categories and processes are impervious to the influences of changing sociocultural, economic, and political factors. Poststructural theorists have been instrumental in challenging this notion, pointing to the humanly constructed facets of these same categories and processes as well as the manner in which their emergence and reformulation are contingent on external interests, forces, and agents.

² The extensive media coverage of the Eichmann trial in Israel educated the Israeli public to the struggles and tribulations of those who were caught in the deadly whirlwind of the Holocaust. Thus the demarcation between Masada heroes and Holocaust victims came to be viewed as less significant.

Contributors

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Thomas Weston Fels is an independent curator and writer specializing in photography and cultural history. Among the more than 20 exhibitions he has organized, his *Carelton Watkins: Western Landscape and the Classical Vision* was presented at the J. Paul Getty Museum in 1990. His forthcoming book on collecting photography, *Sotheby's Guide to Photographs*, is scheduled for publication by Henry Holt & Co. in May. He lives in North Bennington, Vermont.

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